

CLAIMS

1. Process for the treatment of tobacco leaves (*Nicotiana tabacum*) comprising the following steps:
  - a) drying and curing of the leaves;
  - b) extraction of dried leaves with a solvent or mixture of solvents;
  - 5 c) re-drying of the extracted leaves;
  - d) elimination of the ribs.
2. Process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the solvent is selected from methanol, ethanol, propanol, isopropanol, acetone, ethylene glycol, water or mixtures thereof; possibly adjusting pH with buffers.
- 10 3. Process as claimed in claim 2, wherein the solvent is ethanol.
4. Process as claimed in claim 3, wherein the solvent mixture is an ethanol/water mixture with a strength of between 20° and 80°.
5. Process as claimed in claim 4, wherein the mixture has a strength of 50°.
- 15 6. Process as claimed in any one of claims 1-5, wherein the weight ratio between tobacco and solvent mixture is between 1:5 and 1:30.
7. Process as claimed in claim 6, wherein the weight ratio between tobacco and solvent mixture is 1:16.
8. Process as claimed in any one of claims 1-7, wherein the extraction  
20 carried out for a time of between 3 and 16 hours.
9. Process as claimed in claim 8, wherein the extraction carried out for 8 hours.
10. Process as claimed in any one of claims 1-9, wherein the extraction temperature is between 20 and 80°C.
- 25 11. Process as claimed in claim 10, wherein the extraction temperature is 60°C.

12. Process as claimed in any one of claims 1-11, wherein the extraction is performed 1-5 times.
13. Process as claimed in claim 12, wherein the extraction carried out once.
14. Process as claimed in any one of claims 1-13, wherein the leaves are  
5 re-dried under vacuum.
15. Process as claimed in any one of claims 1-13, wherein the leaves are re-dried for 36-48 hours.
16. Process as claimed in any one of claims 1-15, wherein the leaves are re-dried at the temperature of 35°C.
- 10 17. Process as claimed in any one of claims 1-16, wherein Virginia Bright tobacco leaves are used.
18. Tobacco leaves with a low nicotine content obtainable by the process claimed in any one of claims 1-17.
19. Tobacco leaves with a low chloride content obtainable by the process  
15 claimed in any one of claims 1-17.
20. Tobacco leaves with a low nicotine and chloride content obtainable by the process claimed in any one of claims 1-17.
21. Tobacco leaves with improved combustibility obtainable by the process claimed in any one of claims 1-17.
- 20 22. The use of tobacco leaves as claimed in claims 17-21 to prepare smoking products such as cigarettes, cigars and shags, with a low nicotine content and/or improved combustibility.
23. Products containing tobacco leaves as claimed in claims 17, 19 and 20, also mixed with suitable excipients and flavourings.